

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 01694 01 OF 02 241905Z

46

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAB-01

EUR-12 EA-06 ERDA-05 AID-05 CEA-01 CIEP-01 COME-00

EB-07 FEAE-00 FPC-01 INT-05 OMB-01 SAM-01 OES-03

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7196

INFO AMCONSUL CALI

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 BOGOTA 1694

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CO

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT LOPEZ SPEAKS TO THE NATION

1) SUMMARY: PRESIDENT LOPEZ SPOKE ON NATIONAL RADIO-TV FOR HOUR AND A HALF FEB 20. HIGHLIGHTS OF SPEECH WERE HIS ANNOUNCEMENT OF PROPOSED PRESIDENTIAL VISITS TO PANAMA AND U.S. AND CONCLUDING SECTION ON PETROLEUM POLICY SUGGESTING DOMESTIC PRICE INCREASES COULD BE DECREED IN EXCHANGE FOR ASSOCIATION OF FOREIGN OIL COMPANIES WITH STATE-OWNED ECOPETROL. BWTWEEN THESE HIGHLIGHTS HE SPOKE OF BURDEN OF GOVERNING, AND OFFERED LENGTHY DEFENSE OF HIS ADMINISTRATION AGAINST CHARGES THAT THE ECONOMY IS IN RECESSION.

2) THE SPEECH, REGARDED BY LOPEZ HIMSELF AS WELL AS BY MANY VIEWERS AS UNDULY LONG, DID NOT GREATLY CHANGE THE IMAGE OF THE ADMINISTRATION. WHILE IN SOME AREAS, MOST NOTABLY HIS TRIPS ABROAD, THE PRESIDENT WAS ABLE TO GIVE AN IMPRESSION OF INITIATIVE, HIS DISCUSSION OF THE ECONOMY WAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 01694 01 OF 02 241905Z

DEFENSIVE IN TONE. SOLUTIONS AND PLANS WERE LARGELY ABSENT.

THE ADDRESS, GIVEN IN THE CHARACTERISTICALLY LOW-KEYED LOPEZ STYLE, DID LITTLE TO DISPEL THE GROWING IMPRESSION THAT THE ADMINISTRATION FALLS SHORT OF ITS EARLY PROMISE OF DYNAMISM AND NEW DIRECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

1) SPECIAL SESSION OF CONGRESS-LOPEZ BEGAN HIS SPEECH WITHOUT PREAMBLE BY ANNOUNCING THAT HE WOULD CALL A SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONGRESS IN THE FIRST WEEK OF MARCH. THE NEW STATUTE REFORMING THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S OFFICE, ALREADY APPROVED BY THE SENATE, WOULD BE PLACED BEFORE THE CHAMBER. PRESIDENT LOPEZ HOPED THAT THE ELECTION OF A COMPTROLLER WOULD NOT BE DEBATED AND ALLUDED TO THE DESIRE OF SOME LIBERAL CONGRESSMEN TO ELECT A LIBERAL COMPTROLLER. HE RECALLED THAT DURING THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN HE PROMISED THAT THE COMPTROLLER AS WELL AS THE PROCURATOR GENERAL WOULD BE CONSERVATIVES FOR THE TERM OF HIS ADMINISTRATION. LOPEZ STATED THAT THE PARTY WOULD COMMIT AN ERROR IF IT DID NOT LIVE UP TO CAMPAIGN PROMISE.

2) MEETINGS IN PANAMA AND U.S.- THE PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED HE WOULD REQUEST SENATE AUTHORIZATION FOR A THREE-DAY VISIT TO PANAMA MARCH 23 TO MEET WITH THE PRESIDENTS OF PANAMA, COSTA RICA AND VENEZUELA. LOPEZ EXPLAINED THAT THE MEETING WAS A RESULT OF THE U.S.-PANAMA NEGOTIATIONS ON THE CANAL, THE OUTCOME OF WHICH WOULD AFFECT COLOMBIA, COSTA RICA AND EVEN VENEZUELA. COLOMBIA WITH COASTS ON BOTH OCEANS, COULD NOT BE INDIFFERENT TO THE NEW SITUATION WHEN "AS I UNDERSTAND IT, THE ZONE PASSES COMPLETELY TO PANAMANIAN SOVEREIGNTY". LOPEZ ALSO ANNOUNCED "WITH SATISFACTION" THAT HE HAD BEEN INVITED BY PRESIDENT FORED TO VISIT THE U.S. AND INTENDED TO TRAVEL IN THE AUTUMN (BOGOTA 1667).

3) STRONG NERVES AND SELF CONFICENCE-THE PRESIDENT REFERRED TO DEMANDS THAT THE GOVERNMENT PREPARE LONG TERM DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND POINTED OUT THAT COLOMBIA, TO A CERTAIN EXTENT, IS DEPENDENT ON EXTERNAL ECONOMIC FORCES. HE CALLED ATTENTION TO THE WAY IN WHICH U.S. GREAT BRITAIN, FRANCE AND JAPAN CHANGE DIRECTIONS RADICALLY. HE CITED AS EXAMPLE OF LONG-TERM PLANNING DIFFICULTIES THE U.S. TRADE ACT OF 1974, WHICH "CHANGES RULES OF GAME IN SOME LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BOGOTA 01694 01 OF 02 241905Z

RESPECTS FAVORABLY FOR COLOMBIA AND IN OTHERS UNFAVORABLY", BUT OVER WHICH COLOMBIA HAD NO CONTROL.HE URGED COL-OMBIANS TO HAVE STRONGER NERVES, GREATER CONFIDENCE AND SELF ASSURANCE AND TO REALIZE THAT THE COUNTRY LIVES IN A CHANGING SITUATION.

4) FREEDOM TO TELL THE TRUTH-LOPEZ REFERRED TO HIS PROMISE THAT THER WOULD BE NO CRIMES OF OPINION DURING HIS GOVERNMENT AND THAT RADIO STATIONS HAD BEEN CENSORED WHEN SOME EXPECTED

THAT TOTAL LIBERTY WAS TO BE ENJOYED. HE EXPLAINED HIS CONCEPT OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OPINION OR COMMENTARY AND THE DIFFUSION OF FALSE NEWS, CITING CASE OF A FALSE RADIO REPORT FOR WHICH A RADIO STATION WAS SUBSEQUENTLY TEMPORARILY ENJOINED FROM NEWS BROADCASTING. HE ARGUED THAT THE CONSTITUTION GUARANTEES LIBERTY OF OPINION BUT DOES NOT PROVIDE FREEDOM TO INFORM FALSELY OR TO DEFAME. HE REFERRED SUBSEQUENTLY TO "THE OLD COLOMBIAN TRADITION" OF PERSONAL ATTACKS AND INSULTS AGAINST THE HONOR AND REPUTATION OF THE PRESIDENT AND HIS FAMILY.

5) DEFENSE OF ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE--THE SECOND MAJOR PORTION OF SPEECH WAS LONG DEFENSE OF HIS GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE. RESPONDING TO CHARGE THAT COST OF LIVING "DIKES WERE BROKEN" BY JANUARY INCREASES, HE CITED SELECTED FIGURES INDICATING THAT RATE OF INCREASE WAS NO GREATER THAN A YEAR EARLIER. HE SHOWED THAT MONEY SUPPLY INCREASE SINCE HIS INAUGURATION WAS LIKEWISE CONSISTENT WITH PREVIOUS YEAR, BY INCLUDING UPAC DEPOSITS IN HIS DEFINITION OF MONEY SUPPLY. SAVINGS ARE UP, HE SAID, DEMONSTRATING THAT COUNTRY IS NOT IN RECESSION BUT RATHER IN CAPITALIZATION PROCESS. PRESIDENT THEN REFERRED TO SEVERAL CHARTS DESIGNED TO REFUTE CONTENTION THAT CONSUMER SALES DECLINED IN SECOND HALF OF 1974, OR THAT IN SOME CASES (AUTOMOBILES) DECLINE ATTRIBUTABLE TO DELIBERATELY INCREASED SALES TAXES. HE ADMITTED CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY SLUMPING, BLAMED IT ON SHARPLY INCREASED MATERIAL COSTS, AND PREDICTED RECOVERY PARTICULARLY IN LOW COST HOUSING.

6) HE ALSO ADMITTED THAT COTTON AND TEXTILE INDUSTRIES EXPERIENCING TROUBLES, WITH UNSOLD STOCKS VALUED AT NEARLY U.S. \$70 MILLION AND FACING SATURATED WORLD MARKET. BUT HIS GOVERNMENT ASSISTING THESE INDUSTRIES BY BACKING THEIR OUTSTANDING FOREIGN INDEBTEDNESS. IT IS THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 BOGOTA 01694 01 OF 02 241905Z

UNDERWAY WITH U.S. AND OPENING MARKETS IN EASTERN EUROPE, THAT THERE IS HOPE OF SAVING THE SITUATION. TEXTILE PROBLEM ILLUSTRATES, HE ARGUED, ERROR OF CONCENTRATING ON GREATER PRODUCTION, WHEN COLOMBIA UNABLE TO SELL PRESENT OUTPUT OF NOT ONLY COTTON AND TEXTILES BUT ALSO APPAREL, RICE, SOY BEANS AND MEAT, AND WHAT IS NEEDED IS INCREASED CONSUMPTION. REGARDING RICE, HE NOTED GOVERNMENT HAD ISSUED EXPORT LICENSES BUT SO FAR SALES EFFORT UNSUCCESSFUL AND THAT POSSIBLY MARKETS WILL BE FOUND "IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, IN CUBA, IN OTHER OF OUR NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES".

7) ENERGY PROBLEMS--THE PRESIDENT DEVOTED THE FINAL PORTION OF HIS REMARKS TO THE ENERGY SITUATION WHICH HAS BECOME A RENEWED SOURCE OF PUBLIC CONCERN DURING THE PAST WEEK.

HE FIRST REVIEWED THE STATUS OF ELECTRIC POWER AND NATURAL GAS PROJECTS, PARTICULARLY AFFECTING THE NORTH COAST, AND INDICATED THAT AS A RESULT OF PAST DELAYS NO SOLUTION WOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR AT LEAST THREE YEARS. HE THEN ACKNOWLEDGED THAT, BECAUSE HE HAD BEEN GIVEN ERRONEOUS DATA, HE HAD BEEN MISTAKEN IN STATING DURING HIS NOVEMBER SPEECH THAT PETROLEUM IMPORTS WOULD NOT BE NECESSARY IN 1975. WHILE AVOIDING ANY STRICT PROJECTION, HE SUGGESTED THAT IMPORTS COULD BE AS HIGH AS 20-25,000 BARRELS PER DAY AND NOTED THAT WITH ENERGY DEMAND GROWING AT 11 PERCENT ANNUALLY, LIMITATIONS OF PRESENT REFINERY CAPACITY WOULD REQUIRE IMPORTS REGARDLESS OF PRODUCTION LEVELS.

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 01694 02 OF 02 241844Z

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 BOGOTA 1694

8) LOPEZ THEN SHOWED PRODUCTION CURVES FOR ALL COMPANIES WHICH EMPHASIZED THE DECLINING PRODUCTION BY PRIVATE COMPANIES VERSUS STABLE PRODUCTION BY ECOPETROL AND INCREASING PRODUCTION BY COLBRAS WHICH IS HALF-OWNED BY ECOPETROL. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THE REASON FOR THIS SITUATION IN THAT FOREIGN COMPANIES COULD NOT MAKE A PROFIT AT PRESENT PRICES. AS A SOLUTION HE SUGGESTED THAT CONCESSIONS SHOULD BE CONVERTED TO 50 PERCENT ECOPETROL ASSOCIATION IN

ORDER THAT NECESSARY PRICE INCREASES WOULD NOT BENEFIT EXCLUSIVELY THE FOREIGN COMPANIES. ALTHOUGH NEGOTIATIONS ARE UNDERWAY ON SUCH A FORMULA, NO AGREEMENTS HAVE YET BEEN REACHED.

9) THE PRESIDENT ALSO NOTED THAT EXPLORATION PROGRAMS FOR 1975 CALL FOR A SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN EXPLORATORY AND DEVELOPMENT WELLS AND AREA EXPLORED. HE THEN ANNOUNCED THAT THE 50 PER CENT TEXACO INTEREST IN THE COLOMBIAN PETROLEUM COMPANY WILL BE TRANSFERRED TO ECOPETROL IN JULY 1975 (AS OPPOSED TO END OF YEAR EVERSION ORIGINALLY PROJECTED). FINALLY HE AGAIN EMPHASIZED THAT WHILE ELECTRIC POWER PROJECTS REQUIRE 12 YEARS TO BRING ON STREAM AND CRUDE DISCOVERIES 6 YEARS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 01694 02 OF 02 241844Z

HE HAS ONLY BEEN IN OFFICE 6 MONTHS.

10. COMMENT: THE LENGTH OF THE SPEECH (90 MINUTES) AND LOPEZ' SLACKLUSTER DELIVERY DETRACTED SOMEWHAT FROM THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HIS PRESENTATION. ALTHOUGH THE PRESIDENT WAS REASONABLY FRANK IN ANALYZING PROBLEMS (EXCEPT PERHAPS IN HIS SELECTIONS OF ECONOMIC INDICATORS) HE OFFERED VERY LITTLE IN THE WAY OF CONCRETE POLICIES. IT IS THIS DELAY IN FORMULATING SPECIFIC PROGRAMS TO MEET ECONOMIC PROBLEMS FOR WHICH THE ADMINISTRATION IS NOW BEING CRITICIZED. AND LOPEZ APPEARS TO HAVE MADE LITTLE HEADWAY IN COUNTERING SUCH CRITICISM.

11. PRESIDENT LOPEZ ANNOUNCED HIS TRIP TO THE US WITH SUTIALE PERSPECTIVE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF HIS ADDRESS. HE GAVE SPECIAL EMPHASIS TO THE AUSTERITY AND SIMPLICITY WHICH WOULD CHARACTERIZE BOTH THE US AND PANAMA VISITS "AS BEFITS WORKING MEETINGS".

12. THE VISIT TO PANAMA WILL MARK THE FIRST SUCH VISIT BY A SERVING COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT. LOPEZ'S INTEREST IN PROTECTING COLOMBIA'S RIGHTS REGARDING THE PANAMA CANAL IS UNDERSTANDABLE. LESS CLEAR IS THE PURPOSE OF THE VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT IN ATTENDING THE MEETING. PEREZ'S PRESENCE MAY BE YET ANOTHER INDICATION OF VENEZUELAS AMBITIOUS VIEW OF ITS HHemispheric ROLE.

13. LOPEZ REMARKS ON FREEDOM OF OPINION COULD BE NOTHING MORE THAN A DEFENSE OF HIS PROMISE THAT THERE WOULD BE NO CRIMES OF OPINION DURING HIS ADMINISTRATION. THEY MAY ALSO BE A WARNING OF A POSSIBLE CRACKDOWN TO SUCH HARSH CRITICS OF HIS GOVERNMENT AS THE COMMUNIST VOZ PROLETARIA AND LEFTIST ALTERNATIVA, WHICH HAVE OFTEN DISTORTED THE FACTS IN THEIR ATTACKS.

14. THIS DEFENSE OF ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE, INVOLVING NUMEROUS CHARTS, WAS DULL AND UNCONVINCING. CHARACTERIZATION

OF GROWING SAVINGS AS "CAPITALIZATION" RATHER THAN EVIDENCE OF RECESSION, WITHOUT ANY REFERENCE TO LEVEL OF NEW INVESTMENTS, STRIKES US AS MERE PLAYING WITH WORDS. IT IS ALSO SOMEWHAT INCONSISTENT WITH LATER ASSERTION THAT COUNTRY NEEDS TO PRODUCE LESS AND CONSUME MORE. SIMILARLY, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BOGOTA 01694 02 OF 02 241844Z

CHARTS USED TO DOMONSTRATE NON-EXISTENCE OF RECESSION WERE IN FACT NOT MEANINGFUL GIVEN CHOICE OF BASE PERIOD, LACK OF ADJUSTMENT FOR SEASONALITY, AND LACK OF COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS YEARS. OF GREATER IMPORTANCE, PROBABLY IS MODERATION PRESIDENT SHOWED IN HIS VARIOUS REFERENCES TO US TRADE ACT, AND HIC CITATION OF TEXTILE NEGOTIATIONS WITH U.S. AS HOPEFUL DEVELOPMENT.

15. HIS REFERENCE TO POSSIBLY FINDING A MARKET FOR RICE IN CUBA WAS BURIED IN SPEECH, OFFHAND, ALMOST A THROWAWAY. WE HAVE NO INFORMATION THAT ANY RICE SALES TO CUBA ARE ACTUALLY UNDER CONSIDERATION, BUT IF ANY DIRECT SALES WERE TO TAKE PLACE THEY WOULD IMPLY A CHANGE IN PRESENTLY ANNOUNCED PLLICY OF ONLY AUTHORIZING SALES TO CUBA BY COLOMBIAN SUBSIDIARIES OF MULTINATION CORPORATIONS.

16. THE PRESIDENTS CLAIM OF ERRONEOUS INFORMATION RE PETROLEUM PROSPECTS IS ALSO UNCONVINCING. ECOPETROL AND MINISTRY OFFICIALS HAVE LONG BEEN AWARE OF NEED TO IMPORT AND HAVE PREPARED PROJECTIONS ACCORDINGLY. PRESIDENT AND MINISTER HAVE IN PAST STATEMENT APPARENTLY CHOSEN TO UTILIZE MOST FAVORABLE DATA POSSIBLE IN ORDER TO AVOID PUBLIC ALARM OVER SITUATION. (SEE BOGOTA 1613) LOPEZ COMMENT RE 175 LEVEL OF EXPLORATION AND DEVEOPMENT (23 AND 32 WELLS, RESPECTIVELY) IS CONTINUED EXAMPLE OF EXCESS OPTIMISM. UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS TOTAL DRILLING UNLIKELY TO BE EVEN 30 PERCENT OF SUCH LEVEL.

17. LENGTHY PRESENTATION OF PETROLEUM GRAPHS WAS SOMEWHAT MISLEADING. HORIZONTAL SCALE WAS STRONGLY EMPHASIZED OVER VERTICAL TO SHOW PRECIPTIOUS PRODUCTION DECLINES. LOCAL COMPANY OFFICIALS WERE ALSO EXTREMELY ANNOYED BY WHAT THEY FELT TO BE UNFAIR COMPARISONS (ECOPETROL SPENDING CONSIDERABLE SUMS TO MAINTAIN PRODUCTION AND COLBRAS STILL IN FIELD DEVELOPMENT STAGE), BUT INDICATED THEY WILL GLADLY ACCEPT CRITICISM IF END RESULT IS BETTER PRICE. PARTICIPATION FORMULA IS SAME AS OUTLINED BY PRESIDENT IN MEETING WITH AMB MAILLIARD. HOWEVER, PRICE ECOPETROL PAYS FOR GREATER PARTICIPATION RIGHTS WILL BE FORMIDABLE OBSTACLE AND INITIAL SUGGESTION BY MINISTER OF MINES OF PAYMENT BASED ON BOOK VALUE AND US 12 CENTS PER BARREL FOR RESEFVES IS CONSIDERED RIDICULOUSLY LOW BY COMPANIES. IN REFERRING TO CONVERSATION WITH MAILLIARD, PRESIDENT LOPEZ LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 BOGOTA 01694 02 OF 02 241844Z

EXPRESSED DISRED THAT /USG PLAY A ROLE (HICIERA CARGO)
IN THIS SITUATION AS IN THE TEXTILE NEGOTIATIONS".
EMBASSY IS NOT SURE WHAT THIS PHRASE MEANS. FINALLY,
WHILE LOPEZ ATTEMPTED TO BE AS OPTIMISTIC AS POSSIBLE AND
PLACED BLAME FOR DELAYS ON PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION,
HIS REMARKS LEAVE LITTLE GROUND FOR EXPECTING THAT
LONG-STANDING PROBLEMS IN ENERGY POLICY WILL BE SOON
RESOLVED.
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